



Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

*Lee Holloway*  
Chairman of the Board

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## CHAIRMAN HOLLOWAY STATEMENT ON PUBLIC POLICY FORUM REPORT DETAILING MILWAUKEE COUNTY'S FISCAL CONDITION

**Milwaukee, WI** – Milwaukee County Board Chairman Lee Holloway released the following statement in response to the Public Policy Forum's report detailing Milwaukee County's fiscal condition:

"I thank the Public Policy Forum for their report, which is generally well balanced. While it indicates some fiscal areas that present a threat, it also identifies positive indicators in other categories. We have clear and serious challenges, but this report shows they are not insurmountable. The report rightly states the County has almost always balanced the budget at year-end. In the rare cases of countywide deficits, we realized surpluses the following years. These results were achieved while keeping our tax levy increases low. Over the last seven years, our average annual property tax levy increase has been just under 2.4%, well below many other local governments in the Milwaukee area.

"The report references the County Executive's 2006 'reality tour,' which was also referred to as the 'gloom and doom tour,' a purported crisis that never quite panned out. The report indicates that this so-called crisis was averted by pushing major strategic decisions off to the future. That may be. But it was also averted because: #1 it was at least partially fabricated (if you declare a crisis and it doesn't happen, **you can take credit for fixing it**), and #2 while there was a serious fiscal challenge in 2006, the County, including **the County Board, stepped up to the plate and found ways to address it, at least for the short term.**

"What is really needed is some serious strategic planning. We've tried this before, with limited results, but now it needs to be done in a more focused manner. A good first step is the work group to establish a multi-year financial forecast for Milwaukee County government, which includes staff from both executive and legislative branches. Its work should provide a solid foundation of fiscal information on which strategic planning can be based. Once this is completed, the Long-Range Strategic Plan Steering Committee, re-established by adopted resolution a year ago, should be appointed and convened to take on the larger issues and challenges of strategic planning.

“The one point in the PPF report with which I strongly disagree is the suggestion of ‘outside intervention’ if County leaders cannot agree on a plan to move forward. That, in my mind, was appropriate for Orange County, California, which went bankrupt in 1994, but it is inappropriate for Milwaukee County, which, while experiencing fiscal challenges, has always shown a willingness and track record of standing up to our challenges head on. For example, just last week, the County Board approved Pension Obligation Bonds (POBs) to better manage some of the long-term pension obligations in Milwaukee County. That resolution is currently sitting on the County Executive’s desk.

“Remember that Milwaukee County is not alone in this situation. In my communications with other elected officials who belong to the National Association of Counties (NACo), I have learned that governments throughout the nation are facing similar challenges. There are many urban counties that are experiencing conditions far more dire than what we face in Milwaukee County.

“I appreciate this input from the Public Policy Forum. But, we cannot rely on just a few to decide Milwaukee County’s future. I also welcome participation from other individuals and groups who wish to weigh in on the future of Milwaukee County government. All residents should be engaged in the democratic process. For my part, I will work with all other County leaders – and I am sure my colleagues on the Board will do the same – to move the County in a positive direction, assuming those leaders are willing to take the long view of the County’s future. Cooperation is a two-way street, and cooperation and long-range thinking are essential to putting this County on the right track.”

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